Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in the Canada Research Chairs Program

Workshop for Research Administration Staff

February 7, 2023
William Doo Auditorium, New College
University of Toronto

Division of the Vice-President,
Research and Innovation

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

CANADA RESEARCH CHAIRS PROGRAM
EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION WORKSHOP

On February 7, 2023, the Division of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, hosted a workshop on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) requirements and practices related to the administration of the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program.

Achieving an equitable, diverse, and inclusive research community is essential to creating excellent, innovative, and significant research. The CRC Program has been a leader in introducing EDI requirements into program administration, prompting institutions to evolve and become more equipped to implement strategies for equity and diversity.

The workshop brought together research administration staff and EDI leads from across the tri-campus community and the affiliated research hospitals who are actively involved in the administration of the CRC Program and its EDI requirements. This event provided an opportunity to share knowledge, discuss both challenges and best practices, and consider strategies and resources to advance EDI within the administration of the CRC Program, with the ultimate goal of increasing the diversity of our Chairholder cohort across the University of Toronto.

This workshop was supported by the CRC Program's Stipend for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

EVENT OVERVIEW

Workshop participants had the opportunity to discuss the CRC Program's EDI requirements, including the requirements for nominating and renewing Chairholders. In considering implementation of these requirements, staff from the Research Services Office provided a walkthrough of the processes for on-campus nominations and renewals at U of T (see the flowchart on page 12); for further details, please consult U of T's online Guide to Nominations and Renewals.

The event also included a panel on supporting Indigenous research, led by Dr. Janet Smylie, Tier 1 CRC in Advancing Generative Health Services for Indigenous Populations in Canada at St. Michael's Hospital, and facilitated by Sandi Wemigwase, Special Projects Officer, Indigenous Initiatives – Research at the University of Toronto. Dr. Smylie discussed how, in conflating EDI and Indigenous community requirements of research, we can unintentionally undermine reconciliation and ethical, responsible research with/in/by and for Indigenous communities. Dr. Smylie encouraged research administrators to take a demonstrated cultural safety training course, such as Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Training; to learn to sit with discomfort and keep listening, even when conversations are unsettling; and to be mindful of one's position of power.

The workshop also focused on implementation of the 2019 Addendum to the original 2006 settlement agreement, particularly the Chairholder targets for the four designated groups (women and gender minorities, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples). Given the importance of achieving these targets by December 2029, there was significant discussion of strategies for meeting Chairholder targets.

The current representation of the designated groups in our Chairholder cohort is summarized in the table below:

Canada Research Chairs at U of T and Affiliated Hospitals January 2023 (total = 327 Chairs)*

Designated Group	Current U of T Representation (Tiers 1 and 2)	CRC National 2022 Targets	CRC National 2025 Targets	CRC National 2027 Targets	CRC National 2029 Targets
Indigenous Peoples	3.7%	1.5%	2.3%	3.5%	4.9%
Persons with Disabilities	5.5%	4.5%	5.3%	6.3%	7.5%
Racialized Minorities	28.7%	16.9%	17.5%	19.9%	22%
Women & Gender Minorities**	48.0%	33.0%	37.0%	44.0%	50.9%

** Current representation is based on data collected by the Canada Research Chairs Program.*
*** This group includes those who self-identify as women, trans, non-binary, or Two-Spirit.*

While the University may be currently exceeding its 2029 targets for some designated groups, chair turnovers or terminations mean that these gains in diversity can be undone without concerted efforts going forward. Until U of T is safely past its December 2029 Chairholder targets, **all new CRC nominations will be targeted postings** open only to those who self-identify as members of one or more of the designated groups.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

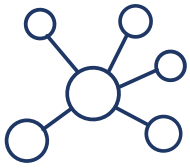
Workshop attendees participated in roundtable discussions, with each table discussing one of three topics: achieving Chairholder equity targets, addressing EDI in research funding nominations, and fulfilling the role of the equity officer in a CRC selection committee.

The roundtable sessions used the "World Café" model, with two rounds of discussion. After the first round, participants moved to a new table to discuss a different topic and build on the discussion from the previous round.

The roundtables enabled workshop participants to engage directly with their peers from across U of T and the Toronto Academic Health Science Network, asking questions, identifying challenges, and sharing strategies.

ROUNDTABLE TOPIC 1:
ACHIEVING CHAIRHOLDER TARGETS

Participants in roundtables on this topic discussed in achieving Chairholder equity targets as well as key strategies or processes that will help divisions/hospitals achieve Chairholder diversity targets for the four designated groups (women and gender minorities, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples).



While we recognize that research administrators are not directly involved in faculty recruitments, they may be involved in related administrative process in instances when a Chair opportunity is tied to a new faculty recruitment. The roundtable groups therefore discussed faculty recruitment issues that divisions or hospitals will need to consider when recruiting Chairs and managing their CRC allocations.

The summary below captures some of the key points from these roundtable discussions.

Challenges:

- There are small internal pools of CRC-eligible faculty members, which can limit the diversity of applicants.
- CRC opportunities may not be reaching prospective applicants from under-represented groups.
- Some faculty, especially those from well-represented groups, are more likely to self-advocate than others.
- Faculty recruitment can be a long process, but CRC timelines are fixed.
- Unconscious biases may disadvantage some candidates, especially if the committee undervalues emerging research methods or deviates from an agreed-upon evaluation rubric.

Actions and strategies:

- Targeted postings are needed and will be adopted until U of T has safely exceeded its December 2029 equity targets.
- Calls for nominations must be open and transparent, and must use unbiased and inclusive language. For example, use the phrase “all genders” rather than “women and men” and use “they/them” pronouns. Avoid describing traits or qualities traditionally viewed as masculine.
- For external recruitments: hiring units can undertake targeted advertising and recruitment, working with networks/colleagues to identify a pool of potential candidates and reaching out to individuals. Units should post in multiple venues and connect with diverse organizations, including those that represent graduate students and post-docs (for Tier 2 opportunities).
- For internal recruitments: distribute opportunities/calls as widely as possible within the division or hospital, working closely with department chairs/directors and Vice-Deans, Research, or equivalents.
- Advertise in the division’s weekly newsletter/regular communication and provide strategic follow-ups with departments.

- Find ways to encourage early-career faculty members to consider applying for Tier 2 Chairs and establish solid mechanisms to help further develop their profiles and improve their chances if they are initially unsuccessful.
- Be mindful of timelines and start planning early for upcoming Chair vacancies, building diversity considerations into the planning process.
- Departments and divisions can build Chairholder targets into faculty search plans and future strategic plans, recognizing that long-term effort is required to build a diverse faculty complement.
- Communications should reinforce the importance of diversity and the unit's/division's commitment to EDI.
- Divisions or hospitals may be asked by faculty members, administrators, or applicants why EDI is a consideration in the recruitment and nomination process and should be prepared to address this point. For example, they should be able to speak to the link between diversity and research excellence; the need to address systemic barriers to participation in research in general and the historic under-representation of the designated groups within the CRC Program in particular; and the real consequences for institutions that fail to meet targets, including a loss of Chair allocations.
- Divisions and committees should hold proactive conversations about any unconscious biases that may arise, noting that all committee members are required to complete unconscious bias education and all committees must include an equity officer (see below).
- Postings and messaging should emphasis the importance and positive purpose of self-identification, encouraging all applicants to respond to questions in the self-identification survey.
- While the roundtables were focused on CRC recruitment strategies, the participants also emphasized the importance of building inclusion after hiring, providing researchers with supports and mentorship, creating programs that are specifically supportive of under-represented groups, and making the research environment more welcoming to marginalized populations.

Other key points:

- RSO will continue to work with divisions and hospitals to assist them in meeting targets at both the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels, monitoring upcoming turnovers and identifying opportunities to increase the diversity of the Chairholder cohort in each division/at each hospital
- Divisions posting for CRC opportunities tied external recruitments should use the updated posting templates, which include new language on EDI.
- On-campus divisions and departments can engage with the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life, on strategies to recruit candidates from under-represented groups.

ROUNDTABLE TOPIC 2:
ADDRESSING EDI IN NOMINATIONS/APPLICATIONS

Participants in roundtables on this topic discuss some the key components of an effective EDI plan, and strategies PIs/nominees can use to develop EDI these plans and carry them out over the life of a research grant (and beyond). A common point of discussion was that EDI needs to be intentionally and thoughtfully incorporated from the initial stages of the plan and should be addressed an ongoing basis.

The summary below captures some of the key points from these roundtable discussions.

Key components of an effective EDI plan:

- Conveys EDI goals with clear terminology, and recognizes that equity, diversity, and inclusion are not synonymous.
- Describes concrete practices and action, rather than using general or high-level language.
- Makes clear distinctions between EDI in research design (e.g., methods) and EDI in research practice (e.g., recruitment, training, the research environment).
- Goes beyond placing an EDI statement into a posting or job description, and instead demonstrates the team's overall principles and commitment to EDI (beyond recruitment).
- Identifies the barriers specific to the team/field of research, providing references when applicable. Makes the plan specific to the actual barriers encountered and develops actions and practices to address these barriers.
- Avoids counting or discussing demographic diversity of the team.
- Includes actions that acknowledge the lived experienced of trainees/research team members and that take intersectionality into account when considering barriers to participation.
- Is transparent about past experience or challenges with EDI, discussing what has worked or failed in the PI's past research programs.
- Has a clear plan for implementation.
- Includes short- and long-term EDI goals/objectives that will guide this implementation.

Some examples of best practices:

- All team members involved in recruitment complete unconscious/implicit bias training.
- Team opportunities (e.g., for trainees or research staff) are posted in diverse places/venues for equity-seeking groups and use encouraging language.
- Those involved in the selection of applicants to team opportunities develop a standard criteria rubric and interview questions.
- Team members provide trainees with equitable access to research and career development opportunities (e.g., conferences, mentorship), relative to their level of study.

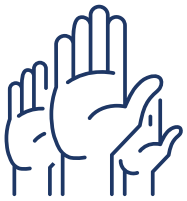
- In addition to holding group meetings with their trainees, PIs can schedule one-on-one meetings to provide individualized mentorship. PIs can also provide training/mentorship to meet students' specific career goals, such as through use of individual development plans.
- The team can share a team- or lab-specific EDI statement that is co-developed with trainees.
- The team accommodates specific and simple barriers. For example, the team can ensure that meetings or events are scheduled during "core" working hours.

Addressing potential challenges/weaknesses:

- EDI plans can sometimes be treated as an afterthought in proposal development. PIs should be thinking about EDI *ahead* of writing the proposal, incorporating EDI in a holistic way from the beginning. A proposal that describes practices already in place will be more compelling than a proposal that only describes future actions. Researchers don't need to wait for an application deadline to start thinking about EDI!
- PIs are sometimes overwhelmed by the prospect of addressing systemic barriers. In fact, they can act locally, implement smaller but meaningful practices in their labs or teams.
- In some cases, PIs just do not know about barriers/practices, or they don't feel confident writing about EDI. In these cases, part of the EDI plan can include identifying the team's/PI's knowledge gaps related to EDI and an outline of steps that will be taken to address these gaps (e.g., participation in workshops/programming, regular team readings on EDI).

ROUNDTABLE TOPIC 3:
THE ROLE OF THE EQUITY OFFICER IN THE CRC SELECTION PROCESS

Participants in roundtables on this topic discussed the role of the Equity Officer and instances when an Equity Officer may need to speak up or intervene regarding an inconsistency in the process or potential unconscious bias. Participants also discussed challenges an equity officer might face when speaking truth to power about EDI. A common and frequent note of discussion was that there must be strong leadership and support from the senior officials to set the tone and to support the equity officer and the overall commitment to EDI.



Instances when an equity officer might need to speak up or intervene:

- Participants noted the need to intervene when there are potential issues in the assessment of "excellence" or in the application of selection criteria. For example, multiple participants identified that they had seen committee members adopt narrow or exclusionary definitions of "excellence." They reported that they had heard comments to the effect that broader or more inclusive definitions of excellence were limiting "good science."
- Participants also noted the need to speak up in the case of inconsistencies in process. For example, two candidates (one local and one from another province or country) may be offered two very different interview experiences. The external candidate could be taken to lunches and dinner and on tours to connect with faculty, while these opportunities were not arranged for the local candidate. In this case, an HR director should intervene to ensure that interview processes were the same for each candidate.
- For more examples, please see the attached guidance document, which was provided to all roundtable participants on this topic.

Potential challenges and solutions when intervening:

- Equity officers may feel like they don't have the support of the committee.
- Equity officers may have an uncomfortable role; in order to be effective, they must be assertive.
- Power imbalances between selection committee members and the equity officer may make the equity officer feel uncertain about their ability to push back and advocate, especially if the equity officer is a staff member or junior faculty member.
- EDI can be discussed with the selection committee from when it its first established (i.e., before review or deliberation), setting the parameters for EDI in the adjudication process.
- The committee chair and leadership should demonstrate support for this role in front of committee.
- The equity officer can be provided with time at the beginning of the deliberation meeting to speak about their role and the about the significance and impact of unconscious bias.

- The equity officer can work with the committee chair to establish “non-negotiables” ahead of time, noting which types of instances will require intervention and course correction.
- A suggestion that arose from these discussions was the development of a community of practice for equity officers. VPRI is currently exploring steps to connect equity officers with each other to initiate an informal network.

Equity Officers Guidance Document: Process Check-Ins And Bias Interrupters

The key role of the equity officer is to support the committee in carrying out an equitable selection process. The equity officer will be expected to act as a "bias interrupter" as required, identifying instances in which implicit bias may affect evaluation of candidates and taking steps to aid the committee in mitigating the impact of this bias.

The equity officer may be required to intervene or employ bias interrupters in the following instances:

- The committee does not consistently evaluate the applications using pre-determined selection criteria (e.g., does not use a standardized evaluation rubric).
- Committee members introduce new criteria in the middle of the adjudication process.
- The assessment process is not consistent with the qualifications, expertise, or research area specified in the CRC posting.
- The committee bases its discussion on factors beyond the required application materials, such as personal knowledge of the applicant or information found through web/social media searches.
- Not all qualified applicants are considered and/or not all application materials are reviewed.
- The committee adopts a narrow or exclusionary definition of "excellence" that is focused only on number of publications, does not take into account the impacts of career interruptions, and/or undervalues non-traditional scholarship.
- Self-identification data is not handled according to best practices, and the committee discusses or guesses demographic information about individual candidates. (While the committee should be attentive to issues of equity and diversity throughout the process, only the committee chair and the equity officer may access the aggregated equity report, and no one on the committee will be able to view individual, record-level equity data.)
- Requests for accommodation have a negative impact on the assessment of a candidate.
- Not all committee members are able to fully participate in the discussion, or the committee comes to a decision before hearing from all members.

When raising an issue or posing a question, the equity officer should maintain a diplomatic tone and, if necessary, speak to the chair privately during a break or after the meeting. The equity officer should also encourage other committee members to raise any concerns about the consistency or transparency of the evaluation and selection process.

U OF T CRC NOMINATION & SELECTION PROCESS OVERVIEW

A) New Chair allocation/reallocation OR retention of vacated Chair slot
Required form (in case of retention): Chairslot retention form

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B) Post the CRC opportunity for a minimum of 30 days (internal) or 35 days (external)
Required form: CRC posting template (internal or external)

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C) Establishment of committee and completion of unconscious bias training
Development of evaluation criteria and review of applications, following CRC Program requirements
Required form: Mid-point Committee Report

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D) Selection of nominee (following CRC Program requirements) and Request for Nomination Approval
Required documents:
Request for Nomination Approval form
Nomination Decision Report
CV of the selected candidate
Aggregated equity report (external recruitments only)

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E) Confirmation of Nomination Acceptance and release of online CRC forms
Required documents:
Nomination Acceptance Letter, signed by the nominee
Completed budget pages (templates provided by RSO)
Divisional Support Attestation form

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F) Submission of the complete nomination package to the CRC Program

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G) Retention of records by the division for 48 months following the nomination deadline

Process last updated February 2022

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- VPRI – U of T Guide to Canada Research Chairs Nominations and Renewals
- CRC Program – Creating an Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Research Environment: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention
- The Toronto Initiative for Diversity & Excellence (TIDE) – Unconscious Bias Education Modules
- VPRI – Addressing EDI Considerations in Your Research Funding Application (Research Teams and the Training of Highly Qualified Personnel)